Letters to the Editor

Sir, Walter Brueggemann points out in his book, From Judgment to Hope, "the best-known text of Hosea" is: "For I YHWH desire steadfast love and not sacrifice/ the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings" (Hosea 6:6). Brueggemann then tellingly points out the connection between 'steadfast love', hesed and 'knowledge of God' or, theology. This theological practice informed by agape has been advocated in the Bhagavad Gita earlier, and later, in the Vijñ□na-Bhairava-Tantra. The latter text gives 112 methods for encountering the 'mysterium tremendum et fascinans'. This does not mean that the composers of either Hosea or these two Hindu texts were aware of each other; it only means that holy people think alike. They want us to yoke together the apparently dissociated ideas of the 'steadfast love' of God with the knowledge of God right now; one is inseparable from the other. Further, external Pharisaical demonstrations of one's relationship with God are unnecessary. In India, this kind of yoking together that Hosea advocates was done by two of our nation's greatest scholars --- Saint Elias Kuriakose Chavara and his spiritual son, the Servant of God, Fr. Canisius Thekkekara CMI. It is a pity that most Indians outside of Kerala do not know of them. Both yoked together 'hesed' and scholarship. We praise Max Müller as an Indologist but forget that the Saint and the Servant of God served India as Indologists. Max Müller did not bother to visit India! Saint Chavara and Fr. Thekkekara CMI are passed over as Indologists. They are taught as theological figures. I urge that this skewed scholarship be corrected since both their Biblical scholarship was distinctly Indian. It is another matter that Saint Chavara was a Sanskrit enthusiast. The Saint felt that not knowing Sanskrit would not do an Indian any good.

What YHWH wants, as found Hosea, was brought to fruition by the Seer Patanjali in his Yoga Sutras. Lectio Divina, or 'swadhyaya' has to be coupled with total devotion to God: 'varapraidhna.' Remember it was not a mere CMI priest we have in the Servant of God- he was a scholar par excellence with two Ph.D's. We are called to emulate the Servant of God. He, like all holy men, is a man for all Indians, not only for Roman Catholics. Baba Kinaram and Baba Vamdeb and Baba Shital Prasad are men for all humanity --- not just Aghoris and Tantrics. This is the beauty of being an Indian. We do not have to confirm to one good. Nor does this mean a dilution of that good --- this Aristotelian 'eudaimonia' is open for all.

My Faith in the Mahavidyas will be shaken if I do not study adequately. Your Faith in the Nazarene will be shaken if you do not study the zeitgeist through the Holy Bible and Patristics. In a polyphonic society like ours, unless I read the just deceased Dominican, Gustavo Gutiérrez's On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent; at the year-end when I sit at Tarapith Mahashamshan in the biting cold; I might be overcome by nihilism and acedia after meeting multitudes of suffering humanity. Unless you read The Spandakarika, you my Roman Catholic fellow-pilgrim might miss the point that in the beginning was God and God is the Word, the Sphota --- the primal 'Spandan', and we await the Advent of this 'Sphota' in the form of the Suffering Servant this Christmas Eve. We study each other's religions superficially to our mutual detriment. Unless some of us choose the ministry of interreligious dialogue at the academic level and now, online, and always, open access; we are doomed. While the best lack all conviction; the worst are filled with passionate intensity, training AI to spread communal hatred. Thus, the need for heeding the Yoga Sutras and Hosea. Thus, the need for open-access scholarship.

Yours truly,

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